

Local Projects, Looking Ahead to 2010

By Sam Farr

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What projects are in store for the Central Coast through the 2010 Consolidated Appropriations Act, which passed in December?

Congress had already passed five of the appropriations bills that fund the federal government. The omnibus appropriations bill, which passed in early December, included six separate bills; the final bill was passed soon after.

There are a number of local projects funded through those seven bills, including anti-gang programs in Monterey County, ocean research and education programs, agriculture training programs and more.

Santa Cruz will see funds for several projects: The El Pajaro Community Development Corporation will receive \$90,000 for a commercial kitchen business incubator to help support local businesses. The Monterey Bay Sanctuary Scenic Trail will see another \$800,000 to continue development of a 52-mile trail around the Monterey Peninsula. This transportation and tourism project will create jobs and become a major draw for the region's tourism industry. The Water Quality Protection Program for Monterey Bay Sanctuary will see \$400,000 to continue protecting the Monterey Bay Sanctuary while sustaining the economic viability of the agricultural industry.

There were also a lot of larger, national programs that will help many residents of Santa Cruz County. I'd like to point out just a few of those. The bill includes \$2.2 billion for community health centers, which provide primary health care to 17 million patients around the country. Another \$7.2 billion will go toward sustaining high-quality, comprehensive early childhood services through the Head Start program. Title I grants for low-income children totaled \$14.5 billion. These funds will help 20 million disadvantaged kids in 55,000 public schools. We directed another \$1.4 billion to provide training and other services to workers affected by mass layoffs.

These are just a sampling of funded programs. This year's appropriations process continued the work that Congress is doing to support Americans as we get our economy back on track.

As dawn breaks on the new decade, what do you believe are the largest issues facing the Central Coast? How do you plan to address them?

In 1992, during President Bill Clinton's successful run for president, political guru James Carville tacked a list up in campaign headquarters. Two of the items on that list were "Don't forget health care" and "The economy, stupid."

The more things change, the more they stay the same.

The first order of business in 2010 will be health care. Now that the Senate has passed its health insurance reform bill, the House and Senate versions will have to be reconciled. This won't be an easy process, especially considering the changes the Senate made concerning key provisions. Once that final bill is negotiated, I'll have to look closely at the costs and benefits before I decide how to vote. Both the House and Senate will need to vote on that final bill.

The economy is the other key as we roll into the New Year. We've seen more positive signs recently, including an increase in the hiring of temporary workers that usually precedes an uptick in full-time employment.

One of the appropriations bills passed in December extended unemployment benefits and COBRA subsidies through February 2010, an important part of supporting out-of-work Americans.

The House also passed the Jobs For Main Street Act. This bill includes longer extensions for unemployment benefits and COBRA. It also redirects \$26.7 billion from the Troubled Asset Relief Program to stabilize public service jobs such as teachers, firefighters and police officers and redirects \$48.3 billion to create infrastructure jobs. As of press time, the Senate has not

taken action on this bill.

There are also a wide range of local initiatives I'm continuing to work on. We're getting closer to an agreement to build a veterans cemetery on former Fort Ord land in Monterey County. We're also nearing the finish line for a new clinic for veterans and active duty members.

I also expect that we'll see a groundbreaking in the near future on the new Monterey Bay Sanctuary Visitors Center at Pacific and Beach Streets in Santa Cruz. I continue to see the tourism industry as a key to reviving our local economy, and the sanctuary is a big piece of that.

And as always, I encourage readers to write my office and let me know what's on their minds. They can reach me at SamFarr@mail.house.gov This e-mail address is being protected from spambots. You need JavaScript enabled to view it .